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LACE.

PART I.

By Mrs. Palliser.

NO textile fabric has contributed more largely to the elegancies and luxuries of life than lace, the most delicate of all. The earliest and most splendid specimens were produced in convents, works of such exquisite skill and patient toil as could only have been executed by those to whom it was a labor of love, and whose dearest office was to deck with the choicest productions of their needle, the shrine of their favorite saint. When lace passed into more general use it was worn in the greatest profusion. It envelopes the infant at the baptismal font, veils the bride at the altar, and still enshrouds the dead in many countries of southern Europe.

The first lace made was of heavy texture, adapted to the solid materials that formed the costumes of the period. It partook more of the character of embroidery, with which it was then constantly united, and consisted of two descriptions called "lacis," or "darned netting," and "cutwork."

Lacis was a network of square ground called "Rezeuil," upon which the pattern was either darned or worked in with counted stitches, "Point compte," like the modern "Filet brode;" or formed of pieces of linen cut out and sewn on or "applied" to the net. This kind of work was executed in large pieces for altar cloths, cloth coverlets, the borders of curtains, and bed hangings, and was often worked in colored silks and gold thread. It is also called "Opus araneum," or "spiderwork."

Cutwork was made in different manners. A network of threads was attached or gummed to a piece of cloth called quintin, from the town in Brittany, where it was first fabricated, and the pattern formed by sewing round the parts of the cloth that were to remain, with button-hole stitch, and cutting the rest away; hence the name of cutwork. At other times no cloth was used, but the threads were arranged on a frame radiating from a common centre, and then worked into various patterns, formed throughout by variations of two stitches.

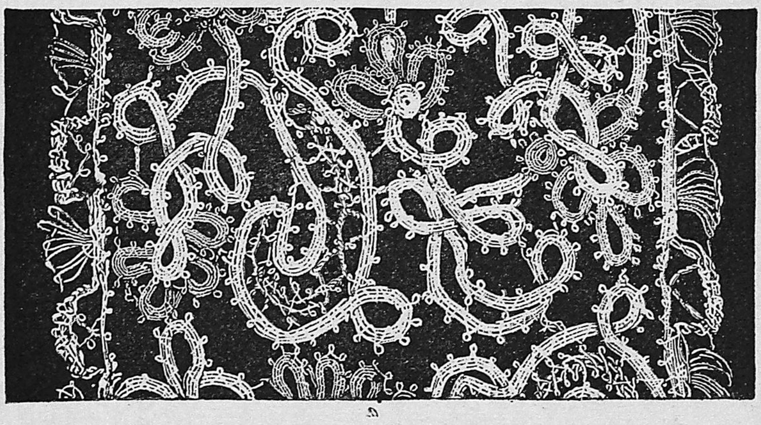


Fig. 1.—Guipure Lace; Italian, Seventeenth Century.

To this class belong the old conventual lace of Italy, often called "Greek lace," and the finer and more delicate geometric laces, which in the 16th and 17th centuries were in universal use, and were all comprised under the general name of "cutworks." Embroidery, lacis, and cutwork, are often combined in the same piece, squares of lacis alternating with squares of linen, in which both embroidery and cutwork are introduced. Many examples are in the museum, among the altar cloths, and other objects of ecclesiastical use, of fine and most curious workmanship.

In the 16th century the making of laces and cutwork formed the principal occupation of the ladies of the day, and numerous books of patterns were published for their use; most of them were printed in Italy. Among these, the works of Frederick Vinciolo, a Venetian, was most widely circulated. These books have now become scarce.

Lace is made of gold, silver, silk, cotton and flax, to which may be added poil de-chevre, and also the fibre of the aloe, employed by the peasants near Genoa and in Spain. It consists of two parts, the ground (French reseau) and the pattern. The ground is generally a plain network of honeycomb, or six-sided meshes, variously formed in the different kinds of lace; and in some of the older descriptions, instead of the network ground, the pattern or flowers are connected by irregular threads overcast with button-hole stitch, or fringed with loops or knots, also styled "thorns." In some kinds of lace there is no ground at all, the flowers joining each other. The pattern or flower, technically called "gimp" or "cloth," from its compact texture, is either made together with the ground, as in Mechlin, Valenciennes and Buckingham; or separately, as in Brussels or Honiton' where it is afterwards either worked into the ground or sewn on' "applied." The little raised cord which surrounds the pattern is called "cordonnet." Lace has two edges; the upper, called "pearl," or "picot," consists of a row of little points at equal distances, forming a kind of fringe to the edge; and the lower, or "footing," a narrow lace that serves to strengthen the ground, and to sew the lace to the material upon which it is to be worn. The openwork, or fancy stitches, are termed "fillings" or "modes."

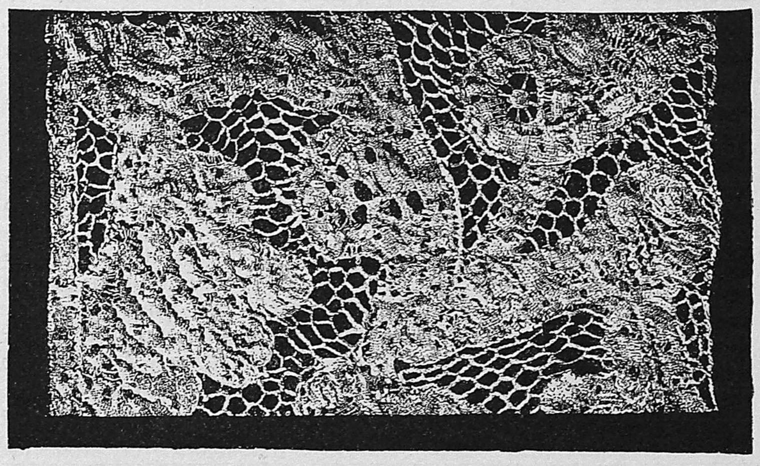


Fig. 2.—Ancient Point; Italian, Seventeenth Century.

Lace is divided into two classes, point and pillow. Point is made with a needle on a parchment pattern; pillow by the weaving, twisting and plaiting of the threads with bobbins, upon the well known cushion which bears its name.

The principal point (i. e. strictly needle-made) laces are the ancient laces of Italy, Spain and Portugal; and the more modern lace of France, called Point d'Alencon. The pillow laces are those of Mechlin, Lille, Valenciennes, Honiton, Buckingham, and many manufactories in France. Brussels makes both point and pillow.

The Italians claim the invention of needle made lace from a very early period, but it was not until the 16th century that it came into universal use; and the points or cutworks of Italy were, with those of Flanders, in general request to form the ruff of Queen Elizabeth, the falling collar of Charles the first, and the "Whisk," or Medicean ruff of his queen, Henrietta Maria. Lace was then worn in the greatest extravagance at the courts of England and France, and not only were the ruffs, cuffs, caps, collars, handkerchiefs and aprons of lace, but even the tops of the boots were trimmed with the same costly material. In underclothing the linen breadths were united by a narrow insertion called "seaming" lace, and sheets, pillow cases and bed curtains were joined in the same manner. All the lace of this period is of geometric design, in squares or circles variously combined. It is not until the end of the 17th century that these forms are replaced by the flowing lines of the Louis XIV style. Lace, like every other ornamental fabric, partakes of the character of the time.

In examining Italian and Spanish lace of the 16th and 17th centuries, it is to be borne in mind that though the finer needle points belong to Italy, and especially to Venice; the points in relief to Venice and Spain; and those made on the pillow to Genoa; yet, as all were the produce of the convent or of private industry, though a general national characteristic may be assigned to each, the same laces may have been made in almost every country of Europe.

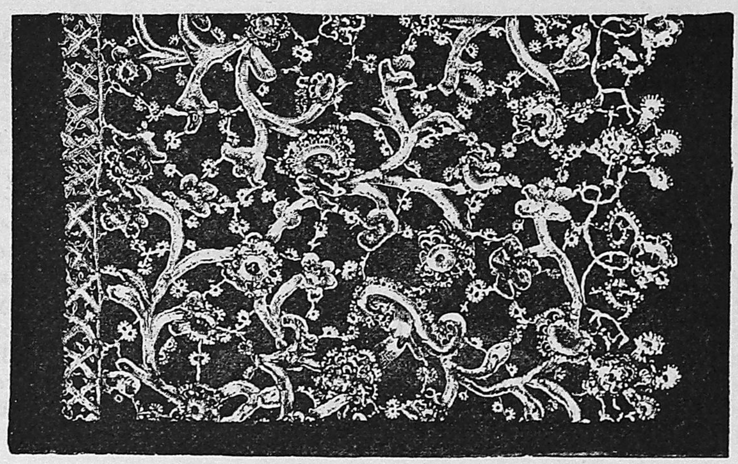


Fig. 3.—Finest Raised Venetian Point; Seventeenth Century.

If Italy claims the priority of needle-made lace, it is to the

Netherlands that we must assign, at a very early period, the invention of the pillow. Lace-making has ever been one of the chief industries of that country, and one of the great sources of its national wealth. When every other manufacture was extinguished by the religious persecutions of the 16th century, the lace trade alone upheld itself, and saved the country from ruin. There are now nearly a thousand schools in Belgium devoted to this teaching, where the children at a very early age learn to twist the bobbins with wonderful dexterity. The old Flemish lace is of great beauty, and the "cutworks" and "points of Flanders" were, in the 16th century, equally esteemed with those of Italy. The laces of Brussels and Mechlin alone were distinguished later by their special names; all other fabrics of the Netherlands were known under the general designation of "Flanders" lace. That description in which the flowers join or are united by "brides," usually called guipure, was in general use for the lace cravats of the 17th century, and the bold, flowing scroll patterns are in the purest style of Louis XIV.

Most celebrated of all manufacturers of lace is that of Brussel, distinguished for the beauty of its ground, the perfection of its flowers, and the elegance of its pattern. The thread is of extraordinary fineness, made of the flax of Brabant. It is spun underground, for contact with the air causes it to break, being so fine as to almost escape the sight,—the lace spinner is guided only by touch. Hand-spun thread costs sometimes as high as $1,200 per lb., and is consequently now but little used, a Scotch cotton thread being substituted, except for the finest lace; but machine-made thread has never arrived at the fineness of that made by hand.

The ground used in Brussels lace is of two kinds, needle-point, "point a l'aiguille," and pillow. The needle-point is made in small segments of an inch wide, and united by the invisible stitch called "fine joining." It is stronger, but three times more expensive than the pillow, and is rarely used except for royal orders. In the pillow-made ground, two sides of the hexagonal mesh are formed by four threads plaited, and the other four by threads twisted together; but these beautiful and costly grounds are now for ordinary purposes replaced by the fine machine-made net so well known under the name of "Brussels net."

The Brussels flowers are of two kinds, those made with the needle "point a l'aguille," and those on the pillow, called "point plat;" both are made distinct from the grounds.

In old Brussels lace the flowers were worked into the ground; the pillow-made or "Brussels plat" are sewn on or "applied." The "modes" or "fillings" of Brussels lace are peculiarly beautiful, and it is also celebrated for the perfection of the relief or cordonnet which surrounds the flowers. The making of this exquisite lace is so complicated that each process is assigned to a separate hand, who works only at her own department, knowing nothing of the general effect to be produced by the whole, the sole responsibilty of which rests with the head of the establishment.

Brussels lace is still called in France by its old appellation of "poind d'Angleterre," or "English point," a name to be explained by history. In 1662, the English Parliament, alarmed at the sums of money sent out of the country for the purchase of foreign lace, prohibited its importation. The English lace merchants, at a loss how to supply the Brussels lace required at the court of King Charles the second, and possessed of large funds, bought up all the choicest lace in Brussels, and smuggled it over to England, where they produced it as "English point." To such an extent was this traffic carried on that the name of "Brussels" lace became every day less known, and was at last entirely usurped by that of "point d'Angleterre," which it retains even at the present time.

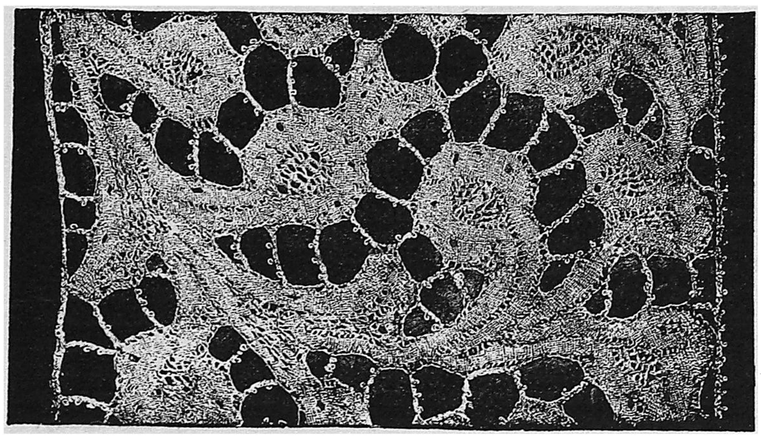
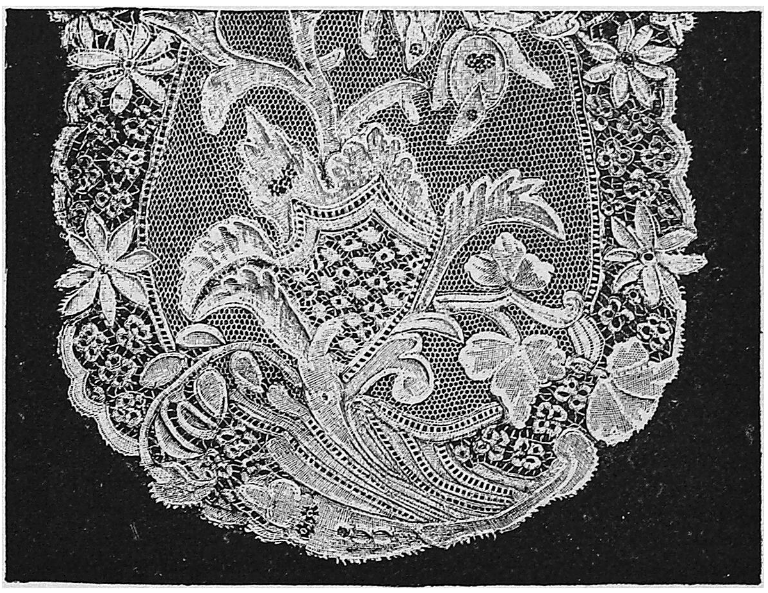


FIG. 4.—GUIPURE, FLEMISH; SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.

Mechlin is made in one piece on the pillow, and is the prettiest of laces. The ground is light and clear. Its distinguishing characteristic is the flat, shining thread which forms the pattern, and gives the appearance of embroidery. The manufacture has nearly died out. Mechlin lace has always held the highest favor in England.

West and East Flanders are the chief seats of the manufacture of Valenciennes lace, the art having been imported thither in the 17th century. It has attained the greatest perfection at Ypres (West Flanders), where it is made of the finest quality, and is remarkable for the large, clear, wire ground, the even tissue of its flowers, and its bold, flowing patterns. Ypres makes the widest Valenciennes known; this is very costly, as high as $400 the yard, but the making of such lace is very laborious; a lace-maker working 12 hours a day, could scarcely produce one-third of an inch a week, and as many as 1,200 bobbins are sometimes employed upon one pillow.



LAPPET, BRUSSELS; EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

A STAINED GLASS WINDOW.

THE stained glass window, illustrated on page 118, was one of the decorations belonging to the pavilion of our most Southern republic at the late Paris exhibition. The design is essentially French, the principal figure is that of a semi-nude woman, symbolizing the republic, bearing in her right hand a winged Mercury. In the foreground is a figure of a South American native woman, holding in her hand a cockatoo. In the background are the soldiers of the republic, bearing their banner, whereon is emblazoned the cap of Liberty. The composition is fine and vigorous, and symbolizes the progress and power of the most enterprising republic in South America.

WOODWORK came within the sphere of art when panels, softened and beautified by curvatures and mouldings, were introduced into frames. In difference of proportions, in ornament and arrangement there is no limit to the artistic modifications that these may undergo. There are rules, however, that do not admit of being transgressed, as, for instance, that the same size of panels should not appear in the upper and lower portion of an article of furniture, for the reason that the lower panels, by an optical illusion, will look smaller, whereas they should appear and be really larger. The upper panels of doors are, on this account, made smaller than the lower. The highest decorative art ever works within set rules, but in the very limitations these impose, ingenuity and taste find the means of providing for requirements founded on the laws of sight and the intuitions of judgment. For example, eyery article of furniture should have its salient points clearly pronounced. A cabinet or sideboard will appear weak in which the pilasters which are essentially constructive in outline and supportive of weight, are little more than outlined. We recently saw a most faulty arrangement in the respective segments of a broken architrave being finished off at the open center with an acanthus leaf rolled back upon each, as if supporting them, the leaf being manifestly unsuited to the purpose. Fitness is a prime necessity in every form of decoration.

SOME of the ornamental woods cannot be smoothly planed, owing to their cross-grained nasure, and must therefore be completed by scraping with a steel scraper and rubbing with glass paper.